

## John Muir Elementary School

3301 S. Horton Street

Seattle, WA 98144

Principal: Awnie Thompson

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In 1996, nearly all the students at John Muir Elementary School were reading below grade level. The principal's leadership, staff efforts, and collaboration with a nonprofit organization called Powerful Schools have helped the school improve and meet their performance goals. The building leadership team at John Muir Elementary meets with Powerful Schools staff every year to discuss strategies for school improvement. Powerful Schools has provided guidance, consultation, and academic interventions for both the school-day and the after-school program. This collaboration enabled coherence and continuity between school-day and out-of-school interventions for struggling students.

- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
- ◆ 55% Black
- ◆ 22% Asian
- ◆ 16% White
- ◆ 1% Native American
- ◆ 62% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 8% Special Education

The after-school program at John Muir Elementary helps students develop academic skills, self-confidence, and future aspirations by bringing community resources into after-school classes and promoting parental awareness and involvement. Powerful Schools made sure no students in need of academic support are turned away for financial reasons. Funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Stuart Foundation, Seattle Foundation, Social Venture Partners, and local businesses provides scholarships for nearly half the participants and defrays the costs of operating rigorous academic interventions.

The program offers a wide variety of academic and enrichment classes. Students performing below grade level are required to participate in tailored academic interventions. For example, second-grade students who do not read receive one-on-one tutoring to promote phonemic awareness and reading fluency. Those who can read but perform below grade level may participate in small class instruction (10 to 12 students per class) where they practice oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension skills. Other academic interventions are offered to students performing below grade level in writing and math. Every year, all teachers attend multiple-day professional development workshops provided by the intervention developers. In these workshops they learn about new features in the academic interventions and instructional strategies.

John Muir Elementary serves predominantly ethnic minority students from low-income families. This creates unique challenges as well as exceptional opportunities. The after-school program uses students' cultural differences as a tool in teaching diversity and tolerance. To enrich students' worldviews, program instructors invite community members to participate and share their experiences. The program's integrated arts curriculum promotes critical thinking skills and is accessible to students across different cultures and learning styles. The program aims to promote academic performance, a caring school climate, resistance skills, and conflict resolution skills while providing equal access to learning across every feature of the program.

## Identifying Students and Student Needs

The principal and teachers may refer to the after-school program students they believe need additional academic or social skills support or a safe place to go after school. Additionally, there is an on-campus family support worker, who is familiar with family contexts and student needs. The family support worker may also refer students to the program. Regular communication with students allows family support workers to suggest improvement actions for the program. For example, program staff added a life skills class based on a recommendation by the family support worker.

A Student Intervention Team, composed of parents, the principal, teacher, special resource teacher, family support worker, and nurse, or any personnel who could give input regarding the student, meets to discuss potential interventions (e.g., participation in the after-school program) for a struggling student. The team identifies options for the individual student to ensure success in school and raise academic and social skills levels.

## Engaging Instruction

Powerful Schools' after-school program has a philosophy of offering students enriching, engaging opportunities to learn when school-day learning might not be effective. The program emphasizes games and physical activities to spark students' interest in academic learning and maximize regular attendance. Some of the courses offered include circus skills, creative sculpture, flag rugby, origami, movie making, and puppet making. Other courses include homework club, reading club, explorations in math, and creative writing.

Academic interventions incorporate engaging instructional techniques, such as educational games, manipulatives, and project-based learning, to motivate students. These strategies make it easier for students to grasp academic content and stay engaged in learning after a long day at school.

## Integration Between the School Day and the After-school Program

Communication between the school leadership team and after-school program staff is well-coordinated at John Muir Elementary, since program site managers are housed at the school and are an integral part of the community. Personal, informal communication between program staff and school-day staff is a priority, and program components are discussed continually to make sure student needs are being met. The school-day staff and program staff also meet formally to discuss alignment and integration of instruction.

Alignment is simplified due to school-day teachers making up more than 30% of the after-school program staff. Many of the after-school instructors participate in various school-day programs and thus personally know the students. This familiarity allows staff to customize their instruction.

The program director of the after-school program and the principal of John Muir Elementary meet twice per year. They discuss the alignment of school-day and after-school instruction, analyze the results of the program evaluation, and modify program design accordingly. The purpose of the first meeting each year is to collaborate on an

alignment plan for the year. The second meeting focuses on reviewing the results and making any adjustments that might be necessary.

### Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

The program contracts an independent evaluator to conduct annual surveys gauging progress and collecting feedback from teachers, program participants, and their family members. Staff design and recommend changes to the program every year based on this feedback. Additionally, the after-school program director at John Muir Elementary and the executive director of Powerful Schools analyze the data and look for gaps between program goals and actual survey results to make decisions about improvements or adjustments to the program.

Teacher survey results indicated the program has led to improved student outcomes since participation began. Specifically, the program has affected the percentage of students turning in homework on time (19% increase), completing homework (23% increase), improving their academic performance (56% increase), and participating in class (47% increase).

On the parent survey, 56% of parents reported that participation in the program helped their children's homework completion "a little" or "a lot." About 53% indicated program helpfulness for reading skills, and 48% indicated program helpfulness for math skills. In addition, 94% of parents indicated the program improved their child's social skills with friends, and 87% reported improved social skills with adults. Finally, 74% indicated the program motivated their child to try harder at school.

According to student survey results, 51% of the participating students at John Muir Elementary thought the program helped them with their homework. About 58% indicated that the program helped them spend more time reading, while 52% said it improved their math skills. Similar to the parent survey, greater percentages reported favorable outcomes in the social skills domain. About 87% of students indicated the program helped them make and keep friends; 84% indicated the program helped them make better decisions; and 89% reported the program motivated them to try harder at school.

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